

## Philosophy of Education

EDU 402

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As I am finishing up my undergraduate career, one thing that I have come to notice lately is that each one of my classmates has so many diverse interests and ideas and will each go on to be a great teacher in a different way. As my undergraduate experience is on the brink of culmination in student teaching, I realize that I have come to discover new aspects of myself over the past four years. I am not only a teacher, I am also a learner, a feminist, an avid reader, a writer, a traveler, a dreamer, a best friend, a sister, an aunt, a daughter, a community member, a banker, a peace-keeper, a yogi, a volunteer, and a runner (sometimes), among other things. All of these aspects of myself are integral to who I am as a person as well as who I will be as a teacher.

My perception of myself as a teacher has also changed drastically recently. Before, I used to see myself as just a teacher of high school students. During my practicum field experience, I realized that I also wanted to teach middle school students. As I've gone through this course, however, I have been thinking about my future quite a bit. I would like to teach middle and/or high school, as well as getting an internship to work with elementary-aged students teaching them how to read. I would also, eventually, like to get a Ph.D. in English and become a teacher assistant for undergraduate level courses and potentially teach at the college level. While before I thought of myself as just a secondary teacher, now I think of myself as a teacher, regardless of how old my students are.

Although my perception on who I will teach has changed, my perception of what I will teach has essentially stayed the same. I will teach my students English / language arts. I will teach them how to read and how to write. I will teach them that reading can be a magical experience; that there is *at least* one book out there for them, regardless of what they think. I will teach them how to question and think critically and how to form their own opinions. I will teach them how to work together and communicate with others. I will teach them as many life skills as possible, because although I believe that school is incredibly important, I believe that being able to function outside of an academic environment is even more important. In terms of how I will teach my students, the answer is simple: I will teach them however they need to be able to learn.

The biggest impact of my own life on my philosophy of education was my K-12 experience. As far back as I can remember, my school system had always placed great emphasis on tracking students. While I would say that it was a welcoming environment, I would also say that we each had a certain group that we belonged to academically, and that while we all interacted socially in elementary school, our academic group began to essentially control our social group also. From an early age, I was tracked into the gifted and talented program, and I stayed on this track throughout middle and high school. Ever since I was put on the gifted and talented track, my teachers and my classmates expected me to take honors or advanced placement courses whenever possible. I remember my math teacher being in disbelief that I chose not to continue on with advanced placement calculus, even when I had spent my entire junior year struggling with honors pre-calc.

In the same way that my school expected me to take advanced courses and attend a four-year college upon completion of high school, so did my parents. My father spent

his life working in manual labor jobs and coming home exhausted and in pain. He abused his body so thoroughly that he now has near-crippling arthritis and receives disability. When I was growing up, he always told me that he wanted more for me than a life of manual labor or a life of working multiple jobs just to make ends meet. My mother wanted the same things for me, but she wanted them because she believes in the power of education to change lives and she always pushed me into taking the hardest classes available, following through with my enrichment courses in elementary school, and preparing for college.

Throughout my time at UMF, I have learned so much about who I want to be as a teacher from all of my professors. In my liberal arts requirements, I learned how to engage students that might not otherwise be engaged by taking them outside and showing them real-world connections from Julia Daly and Grace Eason. I learned how to push students and how to make them better writers from my personal experiences with Sabine Klein. I learned how to make curriculum fun and personalized from Clarissa Thompson, as well as how it connects to the standards. I learned how much one can do with technology from Grace Ward and Theresa Overall. I learned that Shakespeare can actually be a ton of fun from Eric Brown. Although these aren't all of the professors that I've had at UMF, these are just some of the things that I have learned about how to be the best teacher that I can be from my courses—and my professors—here.

Easily one of the most profound experiences that I have had during my time at UMF has been visiting Harpswell Coastal Academy (HCA) for my project on alternative (or non-traditional) schools in History and Philosophy of Education. My group and I spent the day at a public charter school with a huge focus on taking the learning outside

of the four walls of a school. The students spend at least half of two days per week learning in a non-traditional way, such as by going on field trips, doing projects, or doing some independent study. Also, this school has fifty-nine students and six teachers/administrators, with no custodial staff, no bus drivers, and no cafeteria workers. The students serve lunch and clean the school as a part of their curriculum, the teachers drive the vans of students to and from school, and a local bakery makes the lunch for the students with as many healthy, locally grown, organic items as possible.

My stance on the educational issue of alternative education was drastically changed by my visit to HCA. Before, I had always thought of alternative education as schools for kids whose parents could afford to send them to a non-public school, or as a school for students who struggled with engagement and/or discipline issues in the classroom. After visiting HCA, however, I realized that all alternative schools are just a different way to approach curriculum. I also learned that the students at HCA are about one-third students who struggled at their old school, one-third students who are much more advanced and were bored at their old school, and one-third average students. This school is an alternative education program that is for all students, not just students who are struggling.

The most amazing part of HCA, for me, was talking to the students. Every single one of the students that my group and I talked to were ecstatic about coming to school every day. One girl told me that she waits for her van at least ten minutes early every day. One student was telling us about how much faster the day goes by at HCA than his old school, and when his classmate pointed out that they were actually in school longer every day than the traditional schools, he didn't believe her. The students have to do the

cleaning and the food serving, and they are learning not just curriculum but also life skills at HCA—and they are completely enthralled while doing it. After my visit, I realized how many ways there are to teach and it made me want to teach at an alternative school with students as excited as these ones.

Although I felt very positively and also very strongly about the educational issue of alternative or non-traditional schools, I am still very much up in the air about other educational issues, such as Mass Customized Learning (MCL). Although I believe that the idea of giving students as much choice as possible is great, as is letting students move at their own pace, I'm still not sure what MCL would truly look like in my classroom. I also worry about the negative aspects of MCL, such as less group work and a huge emphasis on technology in the classroom. Although I believe that technology is a great tool, I get fearful that we are all relying on technology too much and that people are too plugged-in, which makes it difficult to effectively communicate with others. That being said, I am interested in seeing how MCL works and this has spurred me to want to read *Inevitable*, which outlines the theory behind MCL as well as explains it in greater detail.

These educational issues have spurred me to rethink my own personal philosophy on education, and have resulted in the ways that my educational philosophy has changed over the course of this semester. Other aspects of the class have also affected the way that I think about education, specifically the *TEACH* documentary, *Teaching Hope*, and the “Generations” article. The *TEACH* documentary made me realize that I really feel as though my education at UMF has been lacking in terms of how to teach students how to read. I know that I'll be teaching students in middle or high school who aren't reading at grade level, and this documentary has forced me to realize the real-world implications of

what that means. I have also realized that I have no idea how to teach students how to read, which is going to be a problem in my career going forward. This has spurred my interest in working with elementary-school children during my internship and learning how to help students develop their reading skills. The *TEACH* documentary and *Teaching Hope* also helped me to realize that every educator struggles at some point, and that although this will not be an easy career, it is a career that I truly want to experience. Both of these materials helped me to realize that I am probably never going to be ready to start teaching, but that I can't wait to begin anyway.

The "Generations" article that we read was also especially interesting to me. I found this article very interesting because I rarely think about the differences between generations in the work place. Although I've worked with members of several different generations simultaneously, and I've recognized the tension that can ensue from that particular situation, I've never really stopped to consider why that tension occurs. Most of the time, I think that I tend to write it off as older people being "old-fashioned", which is partially true. This article, however, made me realize that it is more than that. Older people don't dislike computers just because they are "old-fashioned", it's because they are used to communicating more directly and place a higher value on hand-written communication. Also, whenever I hear people from other generations talking about how they can't believe that cursive isn't being taught in some schools anymore, it isn't because they believe that cursive is integral to curriculum or is better than learning how to write in print, it is simply because they are used to having to have "proper", legible penmanship because that is how their inter-office memos were created, whereas my inter-office memos are sent via e-mail. When I think about it this way, I am much more

understanding of why people from the older generation make comments about my handwriting being “sloppy” or “confusing” whereas members of my generation seem to think that it is actually quite neat handwriting.

Although my philosophy of education is constantly changing, right now I am very focused on two philosophies: existentialism and pragmatism. At first, I didn’t think that I would be able to relate to the existentialist theory at all. It seemed so pessimistic and depressing, but if you put the emphasis on the development of students as people, rather than emphasis on the meaningless of our existence. I really like the idea of making education focused on developing students as people, rather than just on developing content knowledge. I am also a huge fan of collaborative learning and working as a learning community through discussion in order to fully develop one’s self. I also think that it is really important to include students’ out of class lives in their in-class learning, as well as taking time to focus on how their feelings impact their development as a person as well as their education.

The other philosophy that I feel most aligns with my own personal philosophy is pragmatism. What I find compelling about pragmatism is that the focus is on teaching students how to apply knowledge, as well as teaching students how to rethink, reevaluate, and solve problems that are constantly changing. Since our world is so dynamic and is constantly in flux, I feel that students need to not just know information, but to understand how to bend and shape that information so that it can be applied. For me, it is important to teach students how to approach content in a variety of different ways and to give them the tools to apply this knowledge. I also like the idea of making learning student-centered, with the teacher as the facilitator, because ultimately students should be

allowed to apply their personal interests in their school life as well as to collaborate and work together to solve problems as a community.

In terms of the eight educational theories, I also find myself focusing on theories that align with existentialism and pragmatism, such as constructivism and reconstructionism. For constructivism, I really like that teachers attempt to empower students and push them to understand the world through their own personal framework and to create meaning that way. This allows for students with different ways of learning, different personalities, and different experiences to understand the world in an authentic, meaningful way. I also love that it is student-centered, encouraging students to explore through activity-based teaching. I also love that the focus is on developing learners who can adapt with the changing times, because our world is continually advancing and that is an important aspect of my philosophy of education.

As far as reconstructionism goes, I think that it also closely aligns with my own personal goals as a teacher. Recently, I have become almost hyper-aware of the social injustices done to all minority groups, as well as the prejudice and race that are omnipresent in American society. These issues trigger hate crimes, rape, murder, and impact American perception in so many ways. By trying to develop learners who are aware of social questions and who explore these questions through curriculum, we can address some of these social issues (rape, eating disorders, the wage gap, etc.) and can create more responsible citizens who help to make the world a better place.

My philosophy of education will impact my classroom in a variety of ways. In terms of the layout of my classroom, I envision having the whole class in a horseshoe shaped configuration for whole-class work or small group pods for group work. It is



likely that we will move through both of these configurations regularly, depending upon what we are doing in class each day. I also hope to have a bookshelf at the front of the room that students can borrow books from if they choose, as well as having “featured books” that are on display throughout the room. As far as my lesson plans go, I intend to roughly sketch out units in advance, but will leave room to work in mini-lessons on tasks that I realize my students need as they arise. While I envision myself planning out big units and thoroughly planning assessments, tasks, and projects in advance, I hope to also leave room in the day-to-day schedule to adapt to my students’ needs on a given day or week.

One of my main concerns is being able to motivate my students. While I hope to motivate students through my passion for the subject matter, I also hope to motivate students through the lessons that I choose. I hope to give students some choice in what is incorporated into the curriculum, such as allowing students to read books of their choosing in smaller, jigsaw groups. In my lessons, I strive to meet students with material that they will find interesting, such as incorporating contemporary young adult literature into my curriculum. Young adult literature deals with characters who are the same age (roughly) as my students, dealing with problems that my students will also have to deal with, and is written in language that they understand. Through my passion and enthusiasm for English, the option of choice, and the incorporation of a variety of reading materials, including young adult literature, into the curriculum, I hope to be able to motivate students to do their schoolwork as well as encourage students to be lifelong readers.

Assessment is also a tricky piece of the puzzle for me. At this point, I have no idea what types of assessment will work for each individual student of mine. I do know, however, that straying from typical multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank tests is something that is a high priority for me. In my own personal experience, I have been most invested in assessment that has enabled me to do something creative and fun. For example, I demonstrated my knowledge on a poem by creating a soundtrack to the poem and justifying why I chose each song. Although I do think that basic reading comprehension quizzes are beneficial in some cases, I see those as more of an opportunity to do formative assessment. In my philosophy, I see summative assessment comprising on a variety of projects and essays/papers or portfolios that students work on both individually and collaboratively to demonstrate their true knowledge and skills.

I hope that the way that I teach my classes helps to make my classroom more inviting to students. I also hope that the way that I interact with students will let them know that I am available to guide them as learners, listen to them as a concerned adult, and empathize with them as a human being. I hope to bring both my love of English and my enthusiasm for life into my classroom and create a welcoming environment for all students. I am also a strong advocate for social change and creating environments that are accessible for all students regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. and I envision myself bringing this sense of equality into my classroom to help set the tone. In addition to the emotional acceptance, I hope that my room can be a space where both myself and my students can express themselves and be proud of their work. I also hope to fill my room with a variety of texts for students to read or leaf through whenever they

have a spare moment, creating an environment where reading is considered to be an exciting endeavor rather than a mandatory exercise.

In terms of my teaching style, I see myself more as a facilitator than an educator. For class readings, I see myself facilitating discussion or leading activities, rather than standing at the front of the class and giving lectures. The only time that I could see myself “teaching” rather than facilitating would be during mini-lessons or mini-workshops on skills that students need to know. In my future classroom, I envision a lot of practice problems for students to work on, group discussion, small-group work, and projects to reveal knowledge. I also hope to be able to tie in service learning projects to my curriculum, as well as working with a variety of other content areas to co-teach or create lessons that work well together across a variety of disciplines, not just the humanities disciplines.

In terms of leadership, I see my philosophy of education helping to encourage me to be an advocate for my students. Since I believe in the importance of social change as a part of the school curriculum, I see myself pushing to incorporate social issues into the classroom. I also see myself as being an advocate for my students in terms of helping them tackle their own social issues and helping them to reform education in a way that works for them. Since I hope to run a student-centered classroom, I think that this will naturally put me in a leadership role in terms of advocating for what my students need, because I will be able to better understand their needs than a teacher in a teacher-centered classroom might.

I hope to be able to contribute a variety of things to my students. I hope to be a caring adult that they can come to with problems, an enthusiastic mentor/teacher, and an

empathetic human. I also hope to be able to make all students see that reading and writing are important, and that there really is something—a genre, a book, an author—out there for everyone that can make reading exciting and fun. To the field of education, I hope to be a pioneer of bringing different types of texts into the classroom—graphic novels, young adult literature, contemporary fiction/nonfiction—and helping my students to understand the values of all texts and genres, as well as how to be successful readers in a variety of texts. I hope to teach students the critical thinking skills that they need, as well as the understanding of the content area of English/Language Arts so that they can know how to read, write, question sources, and form their own unique opinions eloquently on any piece of writing or reading that they come upon.